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Unclassified Summary of Public Positions on INF

The press in West Germany, France and Italy has seized upon President Reagan's statement in St. Louis that his open letter was meant to counter Soviet propaganda. Moscow, looking towards the Vice President's arrival in Rome this weekend, has attacked INF deployment in Comiso.

UK

After commenting critically on the US summit proposal on Wednesday, The Times yesterday took a somewhat less negative tone, noting that the Soviets were taken aback by the US "challenge," and that Moscow remained determined to keep the initiative in the propaganda war over INF. The Guardian remained cynical, referring to "the impression of confusion and indecision in US arms control policy." One of the paper's European correspondents described the Vice President's remarks in the Netherlands as a move away from the zero option in favor of "significant reductions" in INF, and he inferred that the US was leaving open the possibility of a summit before any arms agreement was reached. []

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West
Germany

In Brussels yesterday, Vogel called the President's summit offer "constructive." He also told reporters he had detected no US move from the zero option during his talks with Vice President Bush. The President's statement that his offer to meet with Andropov was an attempt to counter Soviet propaganda has made numerous headlines ("Reagan Admits Letter was Propaganda Reply"--"Reagan: No New Signal"). The Sueddeutsche Zeitung (independent) contrasts the President's statement with a statement made by a White House spokesman that the proposal was "not just aimed at impressing the public." Former Chancellor Schmidt, speaking in Belgium, warned both the US and USSR against "propaganda actions" in the INF negotiations. He said that current US and Soviet contributions to the INF discussions are, "at best, accompanying psychological campaigns" which do not promote the cause of disarmament. []

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France

The French press yesterday downplayed the importance of the summit proposal, claiming that the President and unnamed White House officials had dismissed it as a "propaganda" move. According to the very conservative daily Le Figaro, "the Americans recognize they do not know how to handle their own publicity. The US is now in the position of culprit despite the fact that their stand is the best one from a moral point of view." Former Prime Minister Raymond Barre, in a recent interview in the centrist Le Point, approved Mitterrand's strong reiteration of France's support for the Alliance but, like former President Giscard, implicitly criticized Mitterrand's outspokenness on INF deployment: "Let's not tell others to do something which we are not willing to accept ourselves." []

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Italy

The Leftist Repubblica yesterday criticized the President's recent remarks in St. Louis and noted that "candor in foreign policy can be dangerous and counter productive." It suggested that the President has complicated the Vice President's mission and threatened Chancellor Kohl's electoral prospects. The same theme was echoed by the Christian Democrat paper l'Unita and Paese Sera (Communist). Centrist Corriere Della Sera expressed optimism about the prospects for East-West relations despite Andropov's rejection of the President's summit proposal, citing "rumors" that new proposals for the Geneva negotiations would emerge after the Vice President returned to Washington.

USSR

The newspaper Soviet Russia today called the stationing of GLCMs in Comiso, Sicily, a "dangerous step" and warned that their deployment would further "stimulate the arms race" in the Balkan and the Mediterranean regions. TASS yesterday described the Vice President as functioning "in the best traditions of American advertising." It asserted that his statements while in Western Europe are "fresh proof" that the US lacks even the "slightest intention" of reaching a mutual agreement at the INF talks in Geneva. []

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